

# **COLLEGE AUTONOMY**

## **POLICY, PRACTICE AND PROSPECTS**

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# Preface

The debate on college autonomy is finally taking concrete shape, and it is a great pleasure to bring out this monograph of Professor Ninan Abraham to further that debate. The monograph is an outcome of the seminar that the Centre for Civil Society organised in Kerala on the issue in collaboration with the Kerala Higher Education Forum. The response from participating professors was surprisingly positive—they all agreed that autonomy in matters of curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation system was undoubtedly desirable. The debate largely focused on financial autonomy—how far colleges should be asked to raise their own financial resources.

I am in favour of full autonomy—in matters of curriculum, examination and evaluation, finances, as well as management of teaching and non-teaching staff. Some people fear that with curricular autonomy, colleges will end up with widely differing curricula. My argument to them is that each computer manufacturer is free to decide how many parallel, serial, and USB ports he wants on his product. Despite full autonomy, all computers have similar configurations. Similarly, even though each college would be free to determine its syllabus, most of them will have very similar syllabi, with minor differences in emphasis. However, if a maverick college wants to try something novel and radical, it would be free to take the risk. The college would not have to wait for permission from any educrat. Freedom brings responsibility!

Neither students nor the cause of quality education is served by standardisation. Standardisation of college examinations only benefits admission officers in postgraduate programs. It also provides a convenient yardstick for employers to judge prospective employees. Admission officers and employers can be steered toward seeking alternatives of aptitude tests like SAT or GRE. Much of the world lives comfortably with-

out standardised exams in schools or colleges. We would too. Most important, in a competitive education market, each college has a reputation to protect—easy grades give a cheap reputation. Reputation is a more reliable tool than standardisation to sustain the quality of education.

Financial autonomy would imply that tuition fee and salaries of teaching and non-teaching staff are determined by college managements. Those students who cannot afford to pay should receive assistance in the form of education vouchers or generous loans (in the case of professional students). The government should fund students, not colleges.

As for college staff, I am not opposed to the idea of their union. They can form a union within the college or across colleges to bargain for better terms of service. They should not get government-prescribed salaries, just as the government does not determine pay scales of other professionals like lawyers, doctors, accountants, managers. People working in private institutions live by private rules, not by government dictat: private colleges should be no exception.

Nonetheless, don't be biased by my views. Do read Professor Abraham's thoughtful, balanced, and reasoned approach to college autonomy. The second part of the monograph contains UGC guidelines for autonomy which need to be debated to generate a more conducive environment and necessary reforms to move towards autonomy.

I thank Professor Babu Joseph for his active involvement, encouragement, and persistence in organising the seminar in Kerala and in getting this monograph out of my computer and into your hands. Let autonomy reign!

**Parth J Shah**

President, Centre for Civil Society

## Part I

# College Autonomy

## An Approach Paper

### Professor Ninan Abraham

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**T**he Kerala Universities Bill has a provision for the grant of autonomy to affiliate colleges. Autonomous colleges exist in some other states, the largest number in Tamilnadu, the first state to implement the idea. The Kerala government may also be reaching the conclusion that there is merit in the idea of autonomous colleges. Let us see what an autonomous college is and what it can do.

There is a general impression that the quality of higher education in India, especially in the Arts, Science

and Commerce fields, is not high or equal to international standards. We find an authoritative expression of this view in the report of the Kothari Education Commission (1966):

*In international comparison it would be wrong to compare our first degree in Arts, Commerce and Science with the corresponding first degrees of educationally advanced countries.*

The Commission suggested that some changes in the structure of higher education particularly in the control of the Universities over the colleges, would improve the quality of education in the colleges. The University Grants Commission, which took up the idea, makes the following observation:

*All attempts in the reform of university education in the way of curriculum development, changes in the system and its subsequent feedback into the teaching process and changes in teaching methods in keeping with the changing times and the changing content of university education have tended, in the last few years, to get defeated by the existing rigidity in the structure of the universities, particularly because of the absence of academic the institutions.*

*Again: Academic autonomy has always been regarded as a fundamental necessity for institutions of higher education. The conspicuous absence of this academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the case of colleges in India has been the greatest dysfunctional factor responsible for the decline in standards.*

## **I. Historical origins**

**A**s low standards in colleges and universities are being attributed to the structural relation between the colleges and the universities, let us have a look at the origin of universities and colleges and how their relationships have evolved elsewhere and in India. The name 'university' is derived from the Latin word *universitas* meaning 'the whole'. It probably signifies that the university should intend to deal with the 'whole' or the 'universe', of knowledge.



As modern Indian universities and colleges are derived from western European models, it is necessary to have a brief look at the growth of the European university. The first institution, which had all the essential features of the modern university, was the University of Paris, which was consolidated only in 1150, although its beginnings go back to 1100. A few years after the University of Paris was established, teachers and scholars from England left the country because of some political problems and started the University of Oxford. Early in the next century, some teachers and scholars shifted from Oxford to Cambridge, setting up a university there. In the beginning universities did not have buildings of their own and moving was easy. The method of teaching was the lecture and the lectures were delivered in rented halls or at the teacher's residence. The students stayed in private lodgings nearby.

Now we come to colleges.

'College' was a term well-known in ancient Rome. In Roman law, a college was an association of persons for a specific purpose, a body of 'colleagues'; persons working together. The purpose could be of various kinds, commercial, religious or political. To be recognised by law as a college, it had to have a charter from some authority, which was given the power by the emperor or the Senate.

In its modern usage a college has reference to learning. It is an incorporated body of persons joined together for an educational, scientific or literary purpose. We have the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Surgeons etc, in addition to ordinary colleges. Some years after universities were established in Europe, educational colleges started coming into being around them. Their purpose was chiefly to provide residences to students. The first college attached to the University of Paris was founded in 1180, about 30 years after the University was established. It was called "The College of the Eighteen", as it was meant for the stay of 18 poor scholars. The first college at Oxford, called Balliol College, was founded in 1260. By the year 1500 there were more than 60 colleges, the majority of them being at Oxford and Cambridge.

Colleges in France and those at the British universities developed rather differently. One of the

Established in the 16th century, College de France still flourishes as an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Education; it has no fees nor examinations, nor awards or diplomas. There are over 40 professorial chairs covering every branch of learning

French colleges, the College of the Sorbonne became a great centre of learning famous throughout Europe. After the Middle Ages, its importance waned, but after the French Revolution, when the University of Paris was reorganised, all major university departments and the library were shifted to the college. The result is that University of Paris and Sorbonne have become two names for the same institution.

Another interesting college that came up in Paris was the College de France. It is not part of the university, but was founded as a rival to it because the university was not strong in scientific studies at the time. Established in the 16th century, it still flourishes as an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Education; it has the peculiarity of not having fees or examinations, nor awarding degrees or diplomas. There are over 40 professorial chairs covering every branch of learning.

The Oxford and Cambridge colleges continued to be places of res-



idence, but as a number of teachers were also staying in the colleges, a certain amount of supplementary teaching started on the premises. Lectures were delivered in university lecture halls, but teachers who were staying in the colleges, and were called 'fellows', gave instruction in their rooms. Teaching in colleges was done in small groups.

In course of time, teaching in colleges acquired the name of 'tutorial' and the practice of one teacher teaching one student at a time became the standard pattern. The tutorial generally took the form of the teacher asking the student to write an essay on a given topic. The student reads out the essay to the teacher at the next tutorial. The teacher does a critique of the essay and suggests ways in which it could be improved. For writing the essay, the student has to do a fair amount of reading and study on his own. He gets practice in articulating his ideas and in expressing them in the best way he can. For the essay to be considered good the student has to show critical

acquaintance with the latest work in the field. The writing exercise and the discussion in the tutorial give the student ample opportunity to develop his thinking.

A second model of the relationship between universities and colleges is that of London in the first few decades of its existence. London was the third university to be established in England; was founded about 600 years after the second British university, viz. Cambridge was started. The difference between London on the one hand, and Oxford and Cambridge on the other, was that at London, the university did not do any teaching. All the teaching was done by the colleges; however, the syllabi were prescribed by the university and examinations were held and evaluation done centrally, as at Oxford and Cambridge.

It was the model of London that was adopted for Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, the first Indian universities. The system suited the Indian context at that time, as there were already many colleges in different parts of the country started by different voluntary agencies. The universities gave recognition for the work that the colleges were doing and helped to standardise it. The universities could not take any direct part in the teaching as most of the colleges were far away from university headquarters.

There are two more types of institutions of higher education, other than the professional institu-

tions, that we should mention. In the first place there are universities which do all the teaching through their departments or 'schools', and do not have any colleges. Most universities in Europe are of this type. The other type of higher education institution is the independent college, which does all its work by itself and has no connection with any university. It prescribes its own syllabi, holds examinations and awards degrees. Such colleges are found in large numbers in the United States.

When the American colonies wanted higher education they were not affluent enough to think in terms of a large institution like a university. They began in a small way by starting a college, which was an almost exact copy of Emmanuel College, a college at the University of Cambridge. This was in 1636, and they called their col-



lege Harvard College after the name of the founder. The college decided upon courses of study, did the teaching, held the examinations and conferred the degrees. Thus came the degree-giving college, in contrast to the European system where only the university gave the degree. As time passed, more colleges were started in colonial America, but they were all independent and autonomous.

It was only in the 19th century that universities were founded in USA. By that time knowledge had grown and bigger foundations were needed, which could afford to pay large numbers of professors and maintain good libraries and well-equipped laboratories. These universities were mostly the type of teaching universities that we have referred to above, not of the Oxford-Cambridge type. But what is to be noted about US higher education is the fact that even after such universities were established in considerable numbers, independent degree-giving colleges continued. More and more colleges and new types of colleges called Junior Colleges and Community Colleges, all giving their own degrees, were added. Their total number runs into thousands. It is some of the features of American colleges that the Government of India and the UGC are trying to incorporate into our colleges without entirely giving up their connection with the universities.



## II. Shortcomings of the existing system

We have seen that there are some resemblances between the Indian affiliating university system and the prevailing systems at Oxford and Cambridge. In both systems the university prescribes syllabi centrally and the examinations are external. This was the position at London also when the first Indian universities were established.

A centralised system has many advantages. There will be a certain amount of standardisation in the courses of studies. Also in the examinations, there will be greater objectivity and uniformity of assessment. These features will be helpful to future employers. If teaching is done in 50-100 small institutions like colleges, each of which has its own syllabi and holds its own examinations, the prospective employer will have to ascertain the standard of each, or hold tests. So a centralised system is to be preferred if the syllabi can be adequate and up-to-date, the courses of study sufficiently diversified and the examinations satisfactorily assess critical and creative powers. Under such conditions the system will be good and the standard high. Such is the position at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. So before we give up the existing system we should be very clear about its defects and the merits of the new system of aca-

The existing bureaucratic and centralised structure of the universities has to be radically altered to avoid delays, to evade attempts at rigid uniformities

demically autonomous colleges.

British universities have an advantage compared to Indian affiliating universities. That is, university headquarters and all the colleges are in the same place, making for easy interaction among teachers of the various colleges and university functionaries. Secondly, central facilities like libraries and laboratories are within reach of all the colleges. Sir Maurice Gayer attempted an arrangement somewhat like this when the University of Delhi was founded in 1924.

However, in India, the colleges affiliated to a university are generally in faraway places. In spite of these handicaps, Indian universities did function satisfactorily in the early years. The number of colleges was small and manageable, and the university could effectively monitor their functions. The system also served the purpose of encouraging the establishment of a number of private colleges by local communities and voluntary agencies. After Independence, the number of colleges grew into thousands, so that there are now universities with more than a hundred colleges

under them.

Examinations became unmanageably massive propositions involving malpractices, corruption and even violence. With the enormous numbers of students and examinations, and the changed work culture of the persons involved, it became impossible for the universities to hold examinations and declare results in time. There were instances of examinations being delayed by a year or a year-and-a-half, and students lost valuable time.

Another weakness that developed relates to courses of study and syllabi. Revision and modernisation of the syllabi became extremely difficult. The UGC describes the situation thus:

*The system as it works creates dilatory procedures. The rigidity of the affiliating system also deprives the good teachers of the opportunity to take initiative for creative, imaginative and more fruitful action. The existing bureaucratic and centralised structure of the universities has to be radically altered to avoid delays, to evade attempts at rigid uniformities to create an elastic and dynamic system and to promote innovation and reform.*

In subject matter and syllabus, most affiliating universities are neither up-to-date nor adequate. Past experience has shown that revision and modernisation are extremely difficult and that they seldom happen. The members of the Boards of Studies who have to take the initiative for this are teachers from colleges which are scat-

tered very widely. Most of them have studied only in ordinary colleges and were never in touch with the growing edge of knowledge in their fields. There may also be no good libraries in their neighborhood in which the latest books and periodicals are available. So they may be incapable and probably also indifferent about such matters. Modernising the syllabi would require them to update their knowledge.

Other factors could also come into play. Changing the syllabi might involve change of textbooks. Some of them may have vested interests in existing textbooks. The net result is that even teachers and colleges, which would like to teach modern topics, are not able to do it.

In teaching, learning and examining also our affiliating universities are weak. In addition to imparting a certain amount of



knowledge, higher education should help develop the critical and creative capacities of the student,

enable him to apply his knowledge in new situations and problem-solving. He should also have acquired the capacity to express himself coherently and effectively, both orally and in writing. It should also inculcate in him the desire and the ability to go on learning. All these characteristics are at low ebb in most of our teaching now.

Our examinations are also not adequate for quality higher education. They are mostly only tests of memory and the capacity to reproduce what one has learned. The questions and the answers required are not such as would test creative and critical ability. The questions have become stereotyped, and students have come to feel that it would be sufficient to read up the appropriate stuff from guide-books three or four weeks before examinations. There is little incentive for them to go deep into the subjects and investigate their foundations and ramifications.

We have indicated only a few of the factors which led the UGC to conclude that the existing affiliating system is incapable of being reformed and significantly

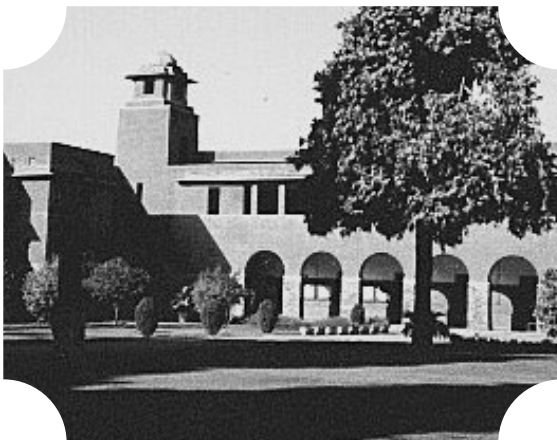
improved without some structural changes.

### III. Gains under autonomy

Generally speaking, an autonomous college as conceived in the present context has freedom and authority in academic matters. Briefly stated, it has the right to decide what to teach, how to teach and whom to teach.

One of the significant things that most autonomous colleges have done has importance from the point of view of employment possibilities for the students who pass out. They have started courses in applied subjects, which are in demand in the employment market. The subjects which the universities had allowed the colleges to teach were, as a rule, subjects coming under traditional disciplines. Hence, the UGC asked universities to add an applied component. Some universities have introduced application-oriented subjects as subsidiary or minor subjects. Many autonomous colleges have made use of the greater freedom that now they have to introduce a variety of subjects. The following is a list of some of them:

- Business administration
- Computer Application
- Communications
- Clothing and Textiles
- Biotechnology
- Applied Psychology
- Information Systems and Management
- Food Service Management
- Microbiology



- Health Education and Sports
- Medical Laboratory Technology
- Indian Culture and Tourism Development
- Hospitality, Administration and Management
- Design and Management of Interior Spaces
- Early Childhood Care and Education
- House Management
- Munitions Technology
- Fisheries
- Personnel Management and Industrial Relations

There are differences of opinion among educational thinkers as to whether studies such as the above are fit for colleges. In the United States, subjects like these are taught in the community colleges, which run courses of two years duration after the higher secondary stage and grant an Associate in Arts or Associate in Science degree. Even if these are not counted as higher education subjects, study of these can come under tertiary education. Tertiary education is necessary for all those who are capable of it in view of the phenomenal growth in knowledge. In our circumstances, with the vast bulk of our tertiary education being in colleges, it would be beneficial to have these as minor subjects for the Bachelor's degree.

Another dimension in which autonomous colleges can make a distinct contribution is by improved methods of instruction. The classical mode of teaching in



higher education, coming down from medieval universities, is the lecture. Lectures are very good for giving an exposition of a topic and will probably remain the chief mode of instruction at the level of higher education. But students' role in the lecture is largely passive, and lectures should be supplemented by other methods of instruction, which will make the teaching-learning process more active and creative for the student. Most of the autonomous colleges have introduced seminars, group discussions, and also more independent work by students such as term papers, projects, etc. Written work helps the student in developing his capacity to express himself and discussions, in various groups, improve his speaking skills.

Low spoken English skills are among the weaknesses which are disqualifying students from the rural areas in selections for many types of jobs. They suffer from the handicap that they do not have a cosmopolitan environment in which a link language like English becomes necessary. They do not get the opportunity to speak English even if they might have

been through English mediums schools. Participation in seminars and group discussions will help the students to get rid of their diffidence about speaking English.

In an autonomous college, activities like participation in seminars, discussions, quiz sessions and written work like essays, term papers, library work, projects etc., can be evaluated and included in the overall evaluation of the student. This is something which is done with difficulty in the centralised system. The fact that these things are taken into account makes both the student and the teacher take these exercises seriously.

All autonomous colleges follow the semester system and conduct continuous internal assessment (CIA). CIA and end-of-semester exams get 50:50 or 40:60 weightage. Another improvement is that the conduct of examinations has become a much simpler and easier job in autonomous colleges.

A person who has had long experience of examinations under both the systems writes as follows: *Decentralisation of the massive examination numbers into smaller college*

*units has reduced the problems also proportionately by a hundred-fold. Mass copying and violence are things of the past. Conducting a final examination quietly for 40 of your own students has no comparison with conducting an examination for 400 'strangers' from different colleges with different propensities and sense of discipline (or lack of it), milling around in the Hall, for different papers. The Controller of Examinations in collaboration with the Head of the Department and the faculty, can handle the question paper-setting, conduct of the examination and the valuation of answer scripts in an efficient manner, and the results are published, in some cases, within a week of the last examination.*

**L**ow spoken English skills are among the weaknesses which are disqualifying students from the rural areas in many jobs. They do not get the opportunity to speak English. Seminars and group discussions will help them get rid of their diffidence

In general, the system of autonomy has brought salutary changes to institutions as a whole. An observer writes:

*One has only to spend a couple of days on the campus of a good autonomous college and interact with the staff and students to find out for oneself the enormous changes that have taken place in the curriculum and the attitudes of students and staff to education as a change agent and a sub-server of society's needs.*

## IV. Difficulties

From what we have said above one may get the impression that the path of autonomy in India has been smooth and pleasant. That is not so. There are at present several factors which put hurdles in the way of such a smooth course. On the basis of replies to a questionnaire sent out to autonomous colleges, answered by 29 of them, Dr Mani Jacob makes the following observation: *The implementation of college autonomy was not a matter of smooth sailing in fair weather. As the colleges left the secure harbour of the affiliation system and ventured into the uncertain waters of innovation and experimentation they were bound to encounter stormy seas. However, this did not deter the majority of them.*

The problems and difficulties which the colleges have been facing will be of interest to those who are considering autonomy. So we give the full list as they have reported:

### 1. Financial constraints

- (a) Financial constraints in choosing text, designing courses and providing instructional material for students
- (b) Grants not released on time
- (c) Low staff salaries
- (d) The problem of becoming a self-financing institution in case the colleges are delinked from UGC's

assistance after helping autonomy to be established will be a problem of the future

- (e) We have to pay money in lakhs to start any new course.

### 2. Problems in administration

- (a) A great deal of clerical work
- (b) Tendency for the system to collapse if not used properly
- (c) Though the college enjoys academic freedom in curriculum framing and evaluation, freedom to replace the traditional courses with more modern and relevant courses that are currently in demand is lacking
- (d) Undue delay in government approval of appointments made by the college on retirement, death and resignation vacancies is a severe handicap of autonomous colleges.
- (e) The insistence that university course structure and pattern be followed in autonomous colleges poses restrictions
- (f) Because of workload norms imposed by the government, enough electives could not be offered

- (g) The real credit system could not be introduced due to workload constraints
- (h) Lack of co-ordination between University, State Government and UGC
- (i) Higher education being in the Concurrent List is a snag
- (j) University interference in the functioning of the college
- (k) Lack of physical space to introduce new courses
- (l) Absence of administrative autonomy
- (m) Lack of adequate manpower
- (n) Minority status is often overlooked
- (o) College not permitted to hold its own convocation as per its convenience
- (p) Parent university making abnormal delay in granting permission or in appointing commissions to the college
- (q) Scope for interaction with UGC officials to discuss problems is limited
- (r) Inability to bring about radical changes in the conventional pattern until credibility is established in the eyes of society
- (s) Heterogeneity in the class is a major constraint in implementing innovative methods. The staff-student ratio is not adequate for satisfactory interaction between the teacher and the students
- (t) The absence of a university department in the given area makes it impossible to introduce new courses in that area.

### 3. Other problems

- (a) Students are not being considered for university ranking
- (b) Students find it hard to spare time for participation in games and sports and other cocurricular activities
- (c) Students are concerned about the scant regard shown for their internal assessment marks by other educational institutions, including parent universities
- (d) Mobility of students to other colleges is hindered
- (e) Students are worried about too many examinations
- (f) Shortening of vacation, as examination days are not counted as working days.

Most of the problems, it will be seen, are because the colleges do not have full autonomy.

## V. Achievements

In spite of the problems and difficulties, almost all the colleges surveyed are of the view that they are making a good contribution and that they would like to go on. This is a consolidated statement of what they think are the achievements of autonomy.

- (a) There is a significant qualitative difference between the autonomous and non-autonomous mode. Autonomy has:
- 1) Created self-confidence
  - 2) Brought clarity of vision
  - 3) Paved the way for reform of examination & the evaluation system
  - 4) Enabled us to evolve a student-oriented teaching technique and
  - 5) Given recognition to the teaching of religion and ethics
- (b) Autonomy has given us wide scope not only to design our own curriculum but also to update it based on the idea of usefulness to society and the employability of the learner. It enables us to adopt our own teaching and evaluation methods in accordance with the requirements of each and every academic program. In brief, autonomy has given greater 'academic freedom',

- c) The major impetus was the creativity of staff and students and examination-oriented teaching and learning have disappeared
- d) It is a challenge to the students and staff and the management. In respect of examination periodic internal tests are conducted, the question papers are set by external examiners and marking is done by both internal and external examiners
- e) There is improved quality of education as well as additional knowledge in the curriculum. There is progress towards imparting higher education on the lines of modernity, relevance and diversification
- f) Autonomy has proved to be not simply a different concept but a distinct educational concept compared to non-autonomous colleges
- g) As expressed continuously by the staff and students of the college, there seems to be great satisfaction about the full freedom they enjoyed to depart from the syllabus of the affiliating university to suit the needs of the students and keeping in mind relevance to society
- h) The college maintains of course with greater 'academic responsibility'



- high standards of teaching and research and also is in the forefront of its potential to experiment with educational innovations in response to emerging challenges in academic, social and economic realms
- i) Autonomy has served as a boon in realising the set objectives of the college. It has provided a conducive environment for promoting and nurturing academic growth, reformation and transformation of the educational system, 'the education', 'the educator' and society at large
  - j) This has led to the administration being more responsive. Students' discipline has also improved
  - k) The benefits enjoyed by students are the good performance given by them in entrance exams, and the ready recruitment of students by companies and firms. This has made the staff and the parents equally happy
  - l) Under autonomy the schedule of the college functions satisfactorily
  - m) Imparting of superior instruction to aid the total personality development of the student
  - n) The tone of academic health has been
  - o) substantially improved
  - p) College autonomy has resulted in increased student enrollment, more professional courses being introduced and instill more accountability in the staff and the students
  - q) The autonomous status of the college allowed for regularisation of the academic session and uninterrupted teaching throughout the session. There was remarkable change and improvement in the student discipline and a noticeable spurt of healthy extra-curricular activities on the campus
  - r) Autonomous status of the college has led to courses being designed relevant to the needs of the rural people. Staff participation in seminars and workshops increased considerably
- Autonomy was an explosion on all fronts simultaneously, and the change from calmness to activity, from core to semester, from syllabus followers to syllabus setters, from dependence to autonomy, from becoming enriched to enriching others, from darkness of repeated practices to the light of autonomy and academic excellence, was a record feat.

## Part II

### UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION: CRITERIA, GUIDELINES AND PATTERN OF ASSISTANCE TO AUTONOMOUS COLLEGES

#### I. Objectives

Autonomous colleges represent a radical departure from the existing structure of the university system in India in which undergraduate or collegiate education, which caters to more than 80% of students in higher education at university level, does not enjoy any academic freedom because of the prevailing affiliation system. The Education Commission regarded the exercise of academic freedom and critical scholarship on the part of teachers as crucial to the "promotion and development of an intellectual climate in the country which is conducive to the pursuit of scholarship and excellence". All attempts at reform of university education in the way of curriculum development, changes in the system of examination, promotion of research and its subsequent feedback into the teaching process, and changes in teaching methods in

keeping with changing times and the changing content of university education, have tended in the last few years to get defeated by the existing rigidity in the structure of universities particularly because of the absence of academic autonomy of the institutions. The large majority of teachers and teaching institutions, viz., colleges have never experienced the freedom and innate responsibility to design the courses of study, to devise appropriate teaching methods and technology and to plan academic development or measures which would help to improve the quality of instructions as well as the learning process.

#### II. Distortions and consequences of affiliation system

The system of affiliation was designed at a time when the number of universities and colleges was small and the function of universities was limited to conducting standardised examination in order to qualify and grade the products for purpose of general employment, mainly in the secretarial services. Universities at that time were not teaching institutions nor was the promotion of scholarship and research considered to be one of their major functions. The situation today is vastly different. The number of students seeking higher education and the number of colleges and universities have multiplied at a phenomenal rate and the

expectations of public authorities and the society at large are far more complex, demanding scholarship and training. With all their backwash effects, these have not only distorted the learning process but have created enormous social problems in the way of corruption, terrorism and violence in the conduct of examination. They have encouraged impersonalisation of teaching and administration, academic stultification and cynicism and alienation of students and teachers from the learning and teaching process. In the case of universities the existence of these large number of college with uneven standards of teaching and facilities has become a definite drag on processes of modernisation, reform and improvement of standards. In the case of the better colleges which have both resources and determination to do quality teaching, the control of the university in matters of curricula and examination has curbed all initiative and imposed rigid structure of course and examination on even such institutions which realise the irrelevance and lack of purpose of much of the work that they are doing. Such colleges feel that the affiliation system has prevented all their efforts towards modernisation and improvement. Academic autonomy has always been regarded as a functional necessity for institution of higher education. The conspicuous absence of this academic freedom and institutional

autonomy in the case of colleges in India has been the greatest dysfunctional factor responsible for the gradual decline in standards.

### **III. Relationship of autonomous colleges with the university**

In the context of the general situation prevailing in India the conferment of degrees can be done by a university established by an Act of the legislature or an institution deemed to be university under the UGC Act. It would, therefore, be necessary for the autonomous college to enjoy autonomy in framing its courses of studies, devising its methods of evaluation and its principles for admission of students, this would require the constitution of its own academic council and exchange. The college may draw on the university departments for expertise in framing its curricula, devising evaluation methods and conduct of examination, selection of teachers etc., but the autonomy of the college should not be solely dependent on university leadership. It must also have an academic council on lines similar to the academic council of a unitary university and must ensure involvement of faculty at all levels, senior as well as junior teachers, in the framing of the academic policies, courses of study, etc.

The boards of studies constituted by the autonomous colleges may have external experts including a representative of the universi-

ty to which the college is affiliated. The decisions taken by the academic council of the college need not be subject to any further ratification by university academic council for other statutory bodies of the university. The functions of the academic council of an autonomous college could also be defined by university statutes. The university degree will continue to be conferred by the university concerned, but the name of the autonomous college will be mentioned.

The freedom to design courses would necessarily extend to provision of new courses and combination of courses not provided for within the existing university curriculum. This would encourage experimentation with desirable educational ideas, and initiate a process for broadening the framework of courses to make them more meaningful and relevant in the context of local and regional requirements for skilled manpower. It may be easier for an autonomous college to respond to such local requirements than for a university with large territorial jurisdiction and the need to ensure uniformity or standardise the provision of courses in institutions of varied resources and capacity, generally at the level of lowest common measure.

Autonomous status may be conferred on the college as a whole or in case of postgraduate colleges on an individual department or faculty for postgraduate course. It

is essential to involve the university as well as the State Government in the process of identification of colleges which are to be conferred such an autonomous status. The proposals for autonomous status should therefore, as far as possible, be sponsored by the university concerned. The criteria for selection should be as under:

- a) Academic reputation and previous performance in university examination and other academic cultural activities
- b) Academic attainments of the staff
- c) The mode of selection of students and teachers viz., whether such selection is without regard to caste, creed or social class
- d) Physical facilities, i.e., library, accommodation and equipments
- e) Institutional management, viz., whether it is motivated by and responsive to academic or non-academic consideration
- f) The financial resources that the management can provide for the development of the institution
- g) The responsiveness of the administrative structure to the views of staff and students
- h) Extent of freedom enjoyed by the staff for advanced scholarship, research and experimentation and

involvement in educational innovation and reforms.

An autonomous college would be ordinarily expected to have plans to shed its pre-university/intermediate classes when the 10+2+3 scheme becomes operational, so as to devote its efforts to degree and postgraduate levels.

#### **IV. Procedure for conferment of autonomous status**

The proposals for autonomy may have to be normally sponsored by the university though the Commission may, on the basis of identifications made by expert bodies from time to time, suggest to the university the desirability of such colleges to be considered. All proposals received from the universities would be examined by the UGC and its decision communicated to the universities. It would also be desirable to provide in the statute of the university relating to autonomous colleges that conferment of the autonomous status will be subject to the concurrence of the UGC. In order to ensure concurrence of the State Government, it may be associated, wherever required, in this connection. In the case of Government colleges, it would be necessary to obtain an assurance from the State Government that the competent staff will not be transferred from the institution after the conferment of autonomous status and an advi-

sory board constituted on lines similar to that in other autonomous colleges.

The functions and power of the Governing Body/Management Committee should be clearly defined so as to ensure that decisions taken by the academic council of the autonomous college are accepted for implementation by the college. However, in case of any dispute in such matters, the Vice-Chancellor of the University may be requested to take decision, keeping in view the need for ensuring academic freedom in all such matters.

The privilege of autonomy may not be conferred once for all but will have to be continually earned and deserved. The status may be granted initially for a period of five years but a review should be undertaken after three years by the university and UGC in collaboration. In case of evidence of deteriorating standards, it should be open to the university after careful scrutiny to revoke the autonomous status.

#### **V. Pattern of assistance**

Conferment of autonomous status on a college will not by itself entitle the college to any extra financial privileges; nor does autonomy mean any transfer of financial commitments to the UGC from the managements or the State Governments. Any extra assistance arising out of the autonomy

would only marginal and related to the special academic program developed by such colleges. This extra assistance would become available from the UGC on a cent percent basis for a period of five years. The question of continuation of such assistance beyond a five-year period either as developmental assistance or as maintenance assistance could be reviewed, taking all relevant aspects into consideration. These colleges would also continue to be eligible for assistance from the UGC in respect of all development programmes applicable to other colleges.

# The Kerala Higher Education Forum

The Kerala Higher Education Forum is an association of senior educators, especially persons who have been associated with higher education as Chancellors or Vice-Chancellors. The Forum arranges consultations, conferences and seminars on matters related to higher education for teachers and administrators. In the past it has organised and arranged curriculum development activities and seminars and discussion on educational reform.

Professor Ninan Abraham, former Vice-Chancellor of Kanpur University works as the Convener. Present members of the Forum include: Prof K A Jeleel, former Vice-Chancellor, Calicut University; Dr M V Pylee, former Vice-Chancellor, Cochin University; Dr A T Devasia, former Vice-Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi University; Dr A Sukumaran Nair, also a former Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi University; and Dr J V Vilanilam, former Vice-Chancellor, Kerala University.

# Centre for Civil Society

## THE POWER OF IDEAS

**T**he Centre for Civil Society is an independent, non-profit, research and educational organisation devoted to improving the quality of life for all citizens of India by reviving and reinvigorating civil society. India got her political independence in 1947 from the British state, but we still do not have complete social, cultural and economic independence from the Indian state. We aim to limit the domain of the state and make more space for civil society. We champion limited government, rule of law, free trade, and individual rights. We are an ideas organisation, a think-tank that develops ideas to better the world. We want to usher in an intellectual revolution that encourages people to look beyond the obvious, think beyond good intentions, and act beyond activism.

We believe in the individuality and dignity of all persons, and their right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. We trust their judgment when they cast their vote in a ballot box and when they spend their money in a marketplace. We are driven by the dream of a free society, where political, social, and economic freedom reigns. We are soldiers for a Second Freedom Movement.

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